

Manager – Parks

Report for period ending Friday 4 May 2007

1. Manager's comments

The public notification for the Mangaroa/Kaitoke possum control operation has been completed. More information about the Akatarawa Forest operation will be sent out closer to the planned start date in July. Officers met with Upper Hutt City Councillors and provided background information about these operations. Presentations regarding the Akatarawa Forest operation were also given to the Kapiti Coast District Council and the Paekakariki Community Board. A ground control operation is well underway at Cannon Point. This area is the part of Akatarawa Forest that is closest to an urban area and means that the 1080 operational boundary can be kept well back from the Totara Park area.

Barn restoration at Queen Elizabeth Park started on 22nd of March. The contractors are moving along very quickly and are nearing completion. The Friends group have had a number of meetings in preparation for painting and flooring.



2. Planning and Policy

2.1 Management planning

Submissions for the draft Battle Hill Farm Forest Park management plan closed on 13 April. Twelve submissions were received. A paper outlining the content of those submissions will be presented to the Landcare Committee in June. The Belmont Regional Park management plan is being drafted and this will also be presented at the June meeting.

Planning staff have been reviewing the Concessions policy (report 07.245) which is presented to this Committee meeting to consider. A paper recommending the format for a GW submission on the proposal to register the Old Coach Road as a historic place is also presented to this Landcare Committee.

2.2 Asset Management system

Parks have been involved in assessing proposals from five suppliers for an Asset Management Information System (AMIS). As the Parks assets are likely to be part of this system, officers have supplied data for the suppliers to use when they demonstrate their proposals during May.

2.3 Pest Control Operation

2.3.1 Pest animals

Goat hunting operations have recently been completed in the south-west section of the Hutt catchment (22 goats) and in Belmont Regional Park (14 goats). Goat numbers are now low in these areas and can be maintained at low levels with periodic sweeps and the use of the Judas goats.



2.3.2 Pest plants

The weed team have waged a major campaign on holly in the bush remnant in Battle Hill Farm Forest Park. This pest is very hard to kill and has been a major issue in the remnant. Bigger trees have been felled over the past few years, but there were many seedlings growing amongst the native vegetation, as well as cut trunks re-sprouting. The weed team have worked their way through the area controlling those seedlings, re-sprouts and any trees still present.



2.4 Monitoring



Monitoring staff have completed the permanent plot re-measurements in the Hutt water collection area and have been working on the plots in Belmont Regional Park and Battle Hill Farm Forest Park. An initial perusal of the data shows that growth of native vegetation in the Belmont Regional Park plots has been excellent. A large number of saplings made life difficult for the monitoring staff in terms of the time taken to measure them, but is good news in terms of regeneration and forest health.

Rhabdothamnus solandri (New Zealand gloxinia and only New Zealand member of the African violet family), a regionally rare species is present in the Battle Hill plot and also appears to be in good health. Further monitoring of the New Zealand gloxinia population in the bush remnant is planned in order to determine the spatial distribution of this species.



Tawa fruit-fall plots have been re-measured in the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo water collection area and in East Harbour Regional Park. While it was not a big fruiting year for tawa, improvement in fruit survival was seen in the both of the mainland island sites in the above areas. In the Wainuiomata Mainland Island site, damage by possum and rodents was recorded as 0% and 1% respectively. Outside, the results show the effectiveness of the mainland island pest control. Prior to the 1080 possum control operation in Wainuiomata/Orongorongo water collection area in 2005, possum damaged fruit were greater than 60%. In East Harbour Regional Park, inside the mainland island area, no fruit were possum damaged, while 11% had rodent markings. Rodent numbers are still not below the target level of 5% tracking as yet in this mainland island site.

2.5 Wainuiomata Mainland Island

The bait stations were re-filled at the end of March. Thirty possums were caught in traps inside the mainland island and a further forty possums were caught on the Moore's Valley boundary. The balloted Roar hunt is currently underway and staff stay out the area during this time. The results of the tawa fruit-fall plots mentioned above show that both possums and rats are continuing to be kept at low numbers.

3. Western sector

3.1 Belmont Regional Park

Many visitors have continued enjoying the park during the autumn months. The ranger has been able to offer information and help to many walkers, mountain bikers, runners and horse riders, regularly patrolling the park tracks.

Three major events have recently been held in different areas of the park. More than 200 riders took part in the Porirua Grand Traverse mountain bike leg. This entered the park from Belmont Road and climbed to across to Round Knob on part of the Puke Ariki Traverse, before descending to Waitangirua. This event was very successful in spite of unfavourable weather conditions.

A large foot orienteering event was held near the old laboratory building at the top of Hill Road. This also had over 200 participants, and separate courses were laid out to cater for different levels of ability.

A mountain bike/run duathlon event was run at Dry Creek, and the competitors enjoyed the views and tracks in this part of the park.

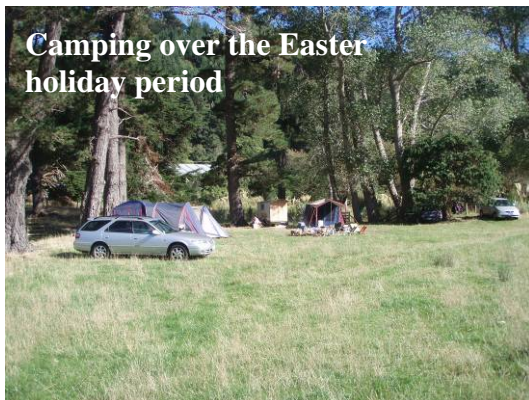
The ranger has continued working with the mountain bike community to improve trail opportunities and address health and safety issues in the park. A voluntary trail construction and maintenance team is being formed from local clubs and individuals to maximise the potential mountain biking opportunities in the park. External funding has been obtained within the cycle industry to provide tools and sign/map resources for future focus areas. A maintenance working bee has been conducted on the Danzig Track by the Hutt Valley mountain bike club. This club was responsible for the initial construction of this track.

The ranger has liaised with several local land owners about requirements to replace park boundary fencing at Boulder Hill and Normandale Road. Terms have been agreed and contractors have been engaged for this work. It is expected that this will be completed by the end of June at both locations.

Liaison between the ranger and various Transpower contractors regarding the line upgrade from Takapu Road to the Hayward's substation has continued. It has been important to coordinate and manage contractor movements and activities during several major competitive events held in the park.

3.2 Battle Hill Farm Forest Park

Battle Hill had a very busy period over the Easter break. With such great weather there were lots of campers and day visitors to the park.



Ranging staff have attended talks to Probus clubs and Mana lions. They have also hosted Scout and Guide groups for camping and completion of their outdoor recreation badges.

The Porirua Grand Traverse (as previously mentioned) crossed through Battle Hill en route to Belmont. This was a great event and the sight of 300 mountain bikers heading four abreast up through the farm was a real highlight.

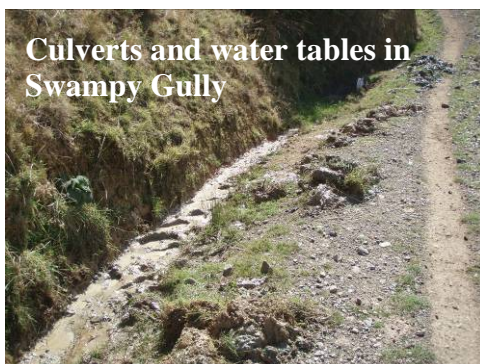
The Great Wellington Wine and Food Festival was held in the Dell area on a very wet and windy day. This event was run by John McGrath a restaurateur from Crazyhorse the Steakhouse. Unfortunately numbers were lower than expected due to the bad weather.



Battle Hill has been undergoing a water system upgrade. This upgrade is designed to store enough water for the summer months when visitor numbers, camping and stock require more water, as well as fixing minor leaks that have collectively had an effect on the water supply to the farm.

A replacement fence between Swampy Gully and the lower Spring Paddock has been completed by our fencing contractors. Ongoing fencing maintenance will continue over the next six months. Preparation for Arbor Day is also underway in Swampy Gully.

Aerial top dressing is about to be carried out with 35 tonne of superphosphate spread over 118 hectares of the farm, and all culverts and water tables in Swampy Gully and campground areas have been checked, sprayed and cleared prior to winter.



The Conservation Corps have been working on the farm this period doing water blasting and tidying up an old fence line. The kids really enjoy getting outdoors and working in a farm environment.

3.3 Queen Elizabeth Park

This period has been all about working with the community. The ranger has been busy attending meetings, participating in working bees, and even helped put a fresh coat of paint on Paekakariki Signal Box. In an effort to promote the use of QEP officers have been attending any and all meetings we are invited too like the Kapiti Emergency Services committee, Friends of QEP, Guardians of the Whareroa, Wellington Tramway Museum, Kapiti Coast Cycleways, Walkways and Bridleways, Anything Vintage Festival organizing committee, Kapiti Bird Club, Forest and Bird, Ornithological Society of NZ, Nature Coast Tourism, Raumati South Residence Group, and the Paekakariki Community Board. The ranger also led a field trip for Victoria University Ecological Restoration masters students. The trip highlighted all the different restoration projects currently happening at QEP.



Annette King (MP Transport) and Bill McCormick (US Ambassador) cutting the ribbon

We had a great day at the park for the MacKay's Crossing opening day. Transit hosted delegates honouring the completion of the highway. There was a walk over to the new over pass where we had a ribbon cutting ceremony, and then we headed back to the park for an afternoon of fun activities hosted by Rotary. The following day the tramway museum had their monthly "Family Funday"! So the weekend was quite a busy one. The park also hosted the ever popular buggy walk. About 60 people

showed up for the hour long trek on the coastal and inland tracks. They had a beautiful day with great views of Kapiti Island. The NZEF had their first big event of the year. About 100 riders entered for the all day cross country event. And to finish off this period the Guardians of the Whareroa had their first planting day! A great day was had by all.

The Park has taken a big sigh of relief with the closing of the gates finally back to 6:00 pm. We had a long busy summer and the park is enjoying a well deserved break prior to the planting season. Officers have finished planned fencing upgrades for the year. We were able to rebuild and restore approximately 3K of fences throughout the park, as well as identifying the fences needing attention for next year.

School holidays seemed to bring warm weather which in turn brought a lot of dumping of rubbish and green waste, as well as the occasional pet! The SPCA has picked up a dog and several kittens from the park. The park ranger has been seen with a net in hand, chasing after bright orange coloured canaries. Fortunately there are no pictures of this activity.

4. Eastern sector

4.1 Kaitoke Regional Park

A new septic tank system was installed servicing the large facility building in the campground. This work was planned in 5 years time but had to be brought forward as more

visitor numbers meant the old septic system was struggling to cope and creating a health hazard.

While excavators were working on the septic tank we took the opportunity to clean the swales in the campground that allow water flow during rain events. These swales were sculptured when the campground was developed twenty years ago and over time had become silted up creating small swamps. The cleaning out of these will allow mower access and reduce mosquito and sandfly numbers, along with keeping campers higher and drier.



A classic Indian summer has meant there are still plenty of people visiting the park. The Easter Holiday period was particularly busy with just over 600 camper nights recorded.

There has been a flurry of filming activity in the park recently, reminiscent of the Lord of the Rings era. TVNZ and The New Zealand Film School have shot over five days worth between them. Filming is always interesting for other park visitors to see and the opportunity to view medieval battles being fought in the forest is pretty rare!



The annual Trolley Derby run by St Josephs Scout Group at Te Marua

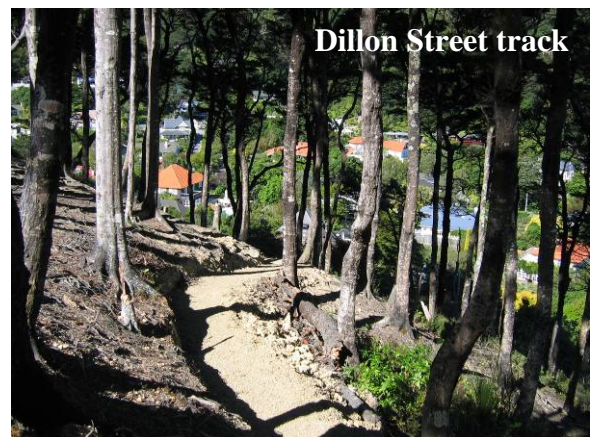


again proved popular with over 60 trolleys entering the event.

A 6 hour multi sport event was run using the Te Marua entrance as a setting. Competitors ran over a section of the Ridge Track then rode inflatable tubes down the Hutt River, finally mountain biking through the Plantation forest then utilising the underpass on Kaitoke hill to complete a circuit through Tunnel Gully. This was part of a national series.

4.2 East Harbour Regional Park

The Fern Gully track upgrade is now complete and what was once a steep slippery route has now been transformed into an easy grade family walkway. As the name



suggests the track sidles up a sheltered gully shaded by towering tree ferns. It's a very attractive walk and a great asset for Wainuiomata and the wider community.

The new loop track off Dillon Street in Lowry Bay is getting plenty of use and public feedback via e-mail has been very encouraging. Ongoing track maintenance continues on a weekly basis and access throughout the park is generally looking good.

As approved by Council through the management plan review, recreational hunting by ballot started on March 31 and runs through to the end of April. This is the first time in a number of years that hunting has been permitted and the response to the ballot was good with over 50 applicants. For safety reasons only two hunters are allowed in the permitted hunting zone at any one time. No animals have been shot to date. In the interest of general public safety GW staff have carried out both day and night patrols.

Also approved by Council as part of the review, a mountain bike route in the northern forest is now established and signage is currently on order. The route takes the rider from Wainuiomata hill summit along the main ridge to Lowry lookout and from there, down Rata Ridge to the lower end of Wainuiomata. These ridges have more acceptable grades in

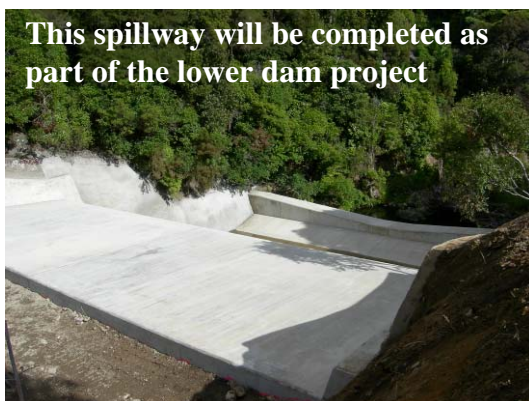
comparison with other tracks in the forest which are generally very steep. Mountain bikers will now have access to some 5km of track in the northern forest as well as the existing Lakes Block access.

Hazards in the park can crop up in the most unlikely of places. A local resident contacted the ranger regarding a couple of 3 metre deep holes in a forest gully behind Lowry Bay. An inspection found the holes located in an old underground holding tank which was part of the original Lowry Bay water supply system. The holes were certainly a serious hazard and have since been covered. The site itself is very interesting with the old dam walls still intact and the stream teeming with native fish.



4.3 Wainuiomata/ Orongorongo Catchments

The opening of the Tana Umaga track is scheduled for the end of May and a lot of preparation work has been undertaken in April. The track has been sprayed for gorse, then scrub cleared. A new seat and lookout point has also been developed. Nine new track signs will be erected to give direction around the tracks. The Tana Umaga walk is a medium level of fitness walk that takes approximately 1 hour 30 minutes.



The lowering of the lower dam project is nearing completion and the final outcome should result in a recreational asset to be proud of.

Work has started on the re-establishment of the rock beds at Morton Dam. The water was starting to carve into the bank and contractors are now reconstructing the floodway. Resource Consent has been granted for the construction of

a rock rip rap along the Wainuiomata River to prevent the collapse of the truss bridge access to the Gums Loop track. Also the ramp up to the swing bridge taking people to the old house site has been widened to allow easier movement of prams and buggies on to the bridge.

The rangers have helped out on the following jobs over the past month to make sure they ran smoothly:

- Bait Station and trap maintenance on the Mainland Island
- Removal of trees to allow the removal of the site office
- Willow treatment of the lower dam area.

Over the last four weeks a public balloted hunt has been in operation in the Wainuiomata Catchment. A total number of 3 deer, 1 pig and 2 goats have been shot.

4.4 Akatarawa/ Pakuratahi Forests

While driving through Akatarawa forest during March the Ranger, Dean Hearfield, came across a wounded kereru which appeared to have been hit by a trail bike and was unable to fly. The bird was carefully transported back to our Upper Hutt Depot and Karin Wylie from the Native Bird Rescue Trust was called. Three weeks later Karin and Dean drove back to the area the Kereru was found and were delighted to release it back into the forest.



Dean Hearfield and Karin Wylie
with the now healthy Kereru

The rebuilding of the Orange Hut is progressing well with the foundations having now been laid and the main concrete floor poured. Currently the block work is being erected using volunteer tradesmen, as was the pouring of the main floor which also required a large volunteer effort by a wide range of clubs. This project certainly encourages a sense of ownership amongst the users and therefore creates a lot of goodwill for the Regional Council ongoing relationship.

Events during this period continue to be popular with access consent requests being received from a wide range of recreational clubs, i.e. recreational 4WD clubs, mountain bike orienteering clubs and several motorcycle events. All of the events have gone well.

During this period the Kapi-Mana Motorcycle Club held their annual Enduro event. This event spanned two days and required complete closure of the forest to other users. As we have had this event annually for the last 7-8 years it has meant that the other users of the forest are now used to this occurring and have no issues with the event.

Murray Waititi
Manager, Parks